The ESCAPADE

A POST MARITAL ROMANCE

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CHAPTER I.

In Which It Is Shown That Marriage Does Not End All!

The romance of life—in novels!—is usually pre-marital. No matter in what wild fury of passion and tempest, outward and inward, the young people may have been plunged, their author seems to think that he has quieted the raging seas of adventure with the oil of his pen—or of his typewriter!—when he has led them to the altar. In the minds of the creators of the children of fancy practically nothing ever happens after the forging of the hymeneal bond. In the world it is usually different.

The circumstances preceding the marriage of Ellen Slocum and Bernard Carrington the protagonists of this veracious chronicle of disturbance, were sufficiently unusual in themselves to have given rise to a number of interesting and highly exciting episodes, upon which with great reluctance I refrain from dilating, for Ellen Slocum belonged to an old and very respectable family domiciled in Philadelphia since the days of William Penn, while Bernard Carrington was an English baron of ancient and honorable lineage whose seat was a dilapidated castle in Dorset.

Ellen was an orphan, her mother having died in giving birth to her. Her father, deceased shortly before her marriage, had been a prosperous merchant and shipowner. Bernard's father, also eliminated from the story, had been a gambler and a spendthrift who had broken his wife's heart and dissipated his own fortune. Consequently, Ellen was blessed with a superfluity of this world's goods which more than matched Lord Carrington's lack of the same. Ellen was a staunch patriot, a rebel and a revolutionist therefore. Lord Carrington was a promising lieutenant in the English navy. In some qualities happily he resembled his mother rather than his father.

Without entering into the details of their previous acquaintance, suffice it to say that they had met while Lord Carrington was a prisoner of war at Philadelphia, and married. The American Revolution was over at the beginning of this romance and the scene is set at Carrington castle in England. Ellen's money, or a considerable portion of it, had been cheerfully used by her to rehabilitate the ancient seat of the family of which she was now become the chatelaine.

There had been much business to attend to in the two years that had elapsed since their marriage; leave of absence had been obtained for Lord Carrington, arrangements for the converting of much of Lady Ellen's property into available securities which could readily be turned into cash, and a deal of planning and working with the architects and builders and so on, so that the marriage had been a happy one despite the fact that there had existed, and still existed, an original difference of temperament and environment between the two as great as had been that between their station in life and places of birth.

The time had arrived, however, when all the preliminaries having been gotten rid of, it was necessary that she should step forth as one of the great ladies of England into which station her money and Carrington's position easily inducted her. Her qualifications for filling that distinguished role were a strong and vigorous young body, a proud and high spirit, a pure and innocent mind, a lovely face, manners simple and unsophisticated, and an unbounded devotion to her handsome and distinguished husband. There was in her blood some strain of the sea and she had spent half her life on her father's ships. She could handle a small boat, or even a great ship, as well as a sailor for instance. And Lord Carrington had amused himself by teaching her how to use pistol and small sword almost as well as he.

She had the disabilities of her qualities, too. She had never touched a card; she had never ridden a horse, she did not even know the steps of the minuet or any other dance, and until her marriage she cared little about that prime feminine pursuit called "following the fashion." The two had been so busy in their first comradeship, there had been so much voyaging between England and America, necessitated by their plans, that there had been no time for these things as yet.

The two lovers had lived for each other and much alone during the period preceding the opening of this story, but with his castle now completely repaired and his fortunes thoroughly rehabilitated, Lord Carrington must needs exploit his good luck by showing his beautiful wife with whom he was very much in love and of whom he was inordinately proud, and eke his castle, to some particular and intimate friends of both sexes—men and women of fashion of earlier and less innocent days. The introduction of several varieties of Adam and a number of distinct species of Eve in this hitherto serpentless Eden caused the trouble to begin. The marriage had stood the test of isolation, the greatest test that could be imposed. Was it to break down before the lesser trial of association? We shall see.

It was an excited and angry Ellen who confronted her lord and master in her boudoir late one autumn night—or to be quite accurate, early another autumn morning. And my lord of Carrington was by no means cool himself, although he was more remarkable for natural imperturbability of manner than his hasty and beautiful wife.

As she spoke with him, however, she let down her hair and carefully removed those extraneous arrangements which had enabled her to raise it towerlike above her brows, doffed her silks, unclasped her stays and assumed a more convenient negligee, in which she was not less charming, as preparation for the imminent fray. It was to be the culmination—the minor culmination that is, the greater would come later—of a series of annoying incidents since the opening of the castle to the house party. My lord and my lady both had grievances which each was eager to present for the calm and dispassionate judgment of the other.

First in Lady Ellen's mind was Lady Cecily Carrington, a cousin several times removed of my lord's. The relationship was not near enough to render my lord immune nor was it remote enough to warrant indifference. Indeed, Carrington had had a rather difficult part to play. Ellen had discovered that an ancient love affair had subsisted between her husband and Cecily and she imagined—not without cause—that Cecily, a representative product of the vicious society of her time, was endeavoring to fan the embers into a flame. Nor could she detect in Lord Carrington's method of handling the situation any very pronounced desire to quench the fire, and his conduct toward his fair and, if reputation did not too greatly belie her, frail cousin, was not distinguished by self-restraint. In Ellen's eyes Carrington manifested a very catholic taste in the eternal feminine, for he gave much unnecessary attention to Hon. Mrs. Monbrant, a widow putatively at least, for no one knew where Hon. Mr. Monbrant was. His wife gave out that he was dead, but that testimony was not of great value. At any rate if he lived, he was wise in his generation and he kept under cover.

In the house party there was another eternal—in more senses than one!—feminine in the person of the ancient and imperious duchess of Dulward. Her great age precluded the possibility of jealousy of Carrington in Ellen's mind, but the chatelaine of the castle did not like the ponderous and vicious dowager any more than the younger pair who were making the running apparently for the affections of her husband.

There was only one woman in the castle whom Ellen really did like, and that was Mistress Debbie Slocum of Massachusetts. In making up the house party Ellen by a freak of circumstances had desired to include some one from her own land. As fortune would have it, a ship opportunely arrived in Portsmouth bearing Mistress Deborah Winthrop Slocum as a passenger, consigned to her kinswoman and friend, the chatelaine of Carrington. Deborah was the exact antithesis of Ellen, a quiet, staid, prim little Puritan, with all the characteristics of the Massachusetts branch of the family, utterly out of place in the society of Lady Cecily and la Monbrant, but not without a certain very definite charm of her own. Her type did not appeal to Carrington, however, and therefore Ellen loved her.

My Lord Was by No Means Cool Himself.

Having surveyed the woman through Ellen's eyes, we may take a look at the men through those of her husband. First in rank there was the duke of Dulward, a hard drinker, a high player and a rich liver; Admiral Benjamin Kephard, a jolly old sailor, and General, Honorable George Athelstrong, an Anglo-Indian soldier on the retired list. The qualities that distinguished the duke of Dulward were common to Athelstrong, in a less degree perhaps owing to their different stations. The party was completed by the presence of Sir Charles Seton and earl of Strathgate. Seton, who was Carrington's most intimate friend, had enjoyed a weakness for Ellen since he first saw her, but the friendship between Carrington and himself had been so true that nothing had been allowed to disturb it—as yet! Now Seton had succumbed to the charms of Mistress Debbie, and as Mistress Debbie clung to the lee—if this were not a nautical romance, I would say, sheltered herself beneath the wing—of Lady Ellen, Seton was consequently always about the pair, and with masculine blindness Carrington jumped at the wild conclusion that there could be no attraction for his friend except what lay in Ellen's charming personality.

So much by way of introduction.

CHAPTER II.

Needles and Pins.

"Sir," began Ellen imperiously, while settling herself comfortably in a chair before the open fire, "you have been pleased to find fault with me about many things which I have borne with what patience I might."

"Patience!" laughed Carrington unpleasantly.

Ellen's eyes flashed.

"You repetition of the word at this juncture serves to emphasize the quality in me, think you not so?" she retorted.

"Pray proceed, madam," answered her husband, dodging the question which indeed was unanswerable from the woman's point of view.

"I shall do so. This morning you actually laughed at me."

"'Fore God, madam, what would you have had me do? Weep? I confess I felt more like it and if I laughed, it was but to turn off an awkward situation."

"And you call it an awkward situation that I was thrown from my horse, do you, and plumped into the brook, and covered with mud, and nearly killed? What made you give me such a horse anyway?"

"I protest. 'Tis the gentlest beast in the stables, and the tamest, I do believe, in all England," returned Carrington bitterly. "A girl of ten could have ridden it."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered his with with equal acerbity, "if the girl of ten had been taught to ride all her life. I told you that I couldn't. I hate the animals. Yet you needs must mount me to have me thrown off to make a spectacle to all your fine friends."

"If you remember," said Carrington, "I advised you to stay at home and you insisted upon going."

"What! And have them say that I was afraid to ride to hounds!"

Carrington in the face of this impasse could only shrug his shoulders.

"You're just about as helpful now as you were then. Why didn't you come to my assistance?"

"You lacked no help, madam. I observed that two of the gentlemen at least were by your side."

"You refer to Lord Strathgate and Sir Charles?"

"A good guess, madam, though an easy one, for they are ever by your side."

"And all you could do was to laugh, to join that painted, powdered coquette, your cousin, and that other bedizined fromp by her side, in jeering at your wife. If I had them on the deck of a ship or a tops'l-yardarm, or at a wheel, I'd show them."

"No doubt," returned Carrington sarcastically, "and perhaps if you put on boxing gloves with them, or tried them out with the broad sword, they would be equally at a disadvantage, but one doesn't look for these things in women to-day."

"There was a time," interrupted Ellen swiftly, her lips trembling, and indeed despite these things she was quite woman enough then, but Carrington was so blinded with passion as to be unable to se it.

"I have had enough of reminiscence," he began curtly.

"Was it in reminiscence," cried Ellen shrilly, "that you had your arm around Lady Cecily in the arbor this afternoon?"

"Did you spy upon me, madam?"

"Spy!" exclaimed the woman. "Lord Strathgate and I—"

"Damn him!" burst out Carrington. "What was he doing with you in the arbor?"

"He is my friend," returned Ellen, "he and Sir Charles."

"I would not have thought it of Charles," cried Carrington angrily.

"It was they who came to my rescue. It was not they who laughed when I fell."

"I tell you I never felt less like laughing in my life to see you made a fool of and those popinjays rushing to your assistance."

"I have been made a fool of," said Ellen steadily. "I am just beginning to realize it. I was well enough when you were alone with me and you were well enough then, but when others came—"

"By heavens, madam, are you contrasting me with that dandy and rogue, Strathgate?"

"He has never spoken to me other than in terms of the utmost respect and consideration in my life," answered Ellen bravely, "and I—"

"He had better not," burst out my lord grimly.

"And I would to God that I could say the same of my husband!" she continued disdaining his threat.

"If you treated me with any deference and paid more heed to my wishes these difficulties would not arise," said Carrington. "If you would be guided by me—"

"And what, pray, would you have me do?"

"Dance, game, act as the rest do, and—"

"I rode to hounds this morning. How think you that would fill the other roles?"

"You might at least try. But you and that canting, little psalm-singing Puritan—"

"That will do, Lord Carrington. You can abuse me, I am your wife; but you shan't say a word about my friend."

"I will say what I please."

"Will you leave my room?"

"I will not."

"Then I will. I swear to you if you do not instantly take your odious self from out my presence I will leave the castle."

"Against my will?"

"Against your will. Against anybody's will."

"And if I prevent?"

"You may be the stronger, probably you are especially since you have forced me to dress in these and lead the idle, vicious life of your society."

Lady Ellen arose as she spoke and kicked vigorously at her stays, which had fallen from the chair upon which she had laid them. It was a great act of injustice to her husband, since nothing would have kept her from being in all things as like to her sisters as she could.

"Madam," began Carrington, astonished at such a charge.

"But you will not overcome me physically without a struggle which will arouse the castle," Ellen ran on hotly. "I am not made of the weak stuff of your fine friends, Lady Cecily and Mrs. Monbrant, even if I did not ride the horse. Now, will you go?"

"As you will, madam," returned Carrington helplessly, "but let me warn you, I'll have no flirting and lovemaking between you and Strathgate and Seton," he went on with increased rigor. "By heaven, I'll call them both out, host or no host. They shall play at swords if they interfere with me."

"And I," returned Ellen, hotly, "if she were not so weak and puny a thing, would call out in my turn your cousin and her friend. As it is I shall be under the painful necessity of slapping her face if I catch it near to yours again. Now you may go."

Lord Carrington, after a moment's hesitation, seeing the futility of argument or remonstrance under the circumstances, turned and stalked gloomily out of the room. Ellen sprang after him, slammed the door, I regret to state, shot the bolts, sank down in her chair, buried her face in her hands, and cried like any woman for all her nerves of steel.

It was not a pretty conversation. It was not a pretty age and men and women spoke frankly to each other. I assure the reader that I have disguised and moderated it by self-restraint.

(To be continued.)